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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3571  
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RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6137  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5269  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1766  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9973  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1055  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3620  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0614  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1839  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0867  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY  
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2896  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000702

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: COPEI LEADERSHIP STEPS DOWN

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(b).

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Summary  
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11. (C) COPEI (Christian Democracy) President Eduardo Fernandez and Secretary General Cesar Perez Vivas resigned from their positions March 10 after the board rejected the party's annual report, according to press reports. Fernandez, a popular but figurehead leader, was gracious in his resignation, saying he wanted to make room for new faces in party leadership. Perez Vivas was strident, however, alleging that Fernandez had packed the COPEI board with his supporters, some of whom he alleged were government sympathizers. National organization coordinator Luis Ignacio Planas was tapped to replace Perez Vivas on a provisional basis -- a temporary president may also be appointed -- while the party organizes internal elections, slated for the end of 2006 or beginning of 2007. COPEI was in rapid decline before the resignations, and will not likely correct that anytime soon, though the new provisional leader Planas has some promise. End summary.

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Resignations, Sanguine and Bitter  
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12. (U) After a heated meeting of the COPEI national board of directors, party President Eduardo Fernandez and Secretary General Cesar Perez Vivas announced their resignations. Press reports said the two offered their resignations after 80 percent of party leaders rejected the annual report on the party's performance. Fernandez, a veteran "Copeyano" politician and former presidential candidate, cast the decision as a way to inject new faces into the party leadership. Perez Vivas was less magnanimous in his resignation announcement, however, alleging that Fernandez had inserted five new party directors -- including Fernandez' son -- without his knowledge. He also alleged that some of these new directors were government sympathizers. Perez said he will remain a COPEI member.

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Party Names Provisional Leader  
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13. (U) To fill the void left by Fernandez and Perez Vivas, the party named the national coordinator for organization Luis Ignacio Planas as provisional secretary general. A provisional president may be named later, according to press reports. Planas commented that the resignations were logical after the board rejected the annual report. He said the decision was a chance for a new generation of Copeyanos to rebuild the party. He said the party would continue in strong opposition to the government, proposing ways to resolve the problems of health, housing, and unemployment in Venezuela. Planas said the party will hold internal elections at the end of the year or the first quarter of 2007.

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Comment  
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14. (C) COPEI, once one of Venezuela's ruling parties, has been in decline for decades. It currently barely registers in national polls, and is politically irrelevant except perhaps among other vestigial "traditional" parties. Perez Vivas was generally thought to have been a dinosaur who refused to give ground to the party's younger generation. Fernandez probably made a power play to remove Perez Vivas by inserting the new directors. Our impression of Planas is that he is a young, energetic leader who has been a source of new ideas in the party. Whether he can make anything of the splintered remains of COPEI, however, remains to be seen. Without strong leaders and a structural reorganization, the

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party will probably continue to have minimal political impact.

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